Lessons Learned: CSAP National Cross-Site Evaluation of High-Risk Youth Programs

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Research Questions

- What risk and protective factors contribute most to substance use among high-risk youth?
- Were programs successful in preventing or reducing substance use?
- What program characteristics were most effective in bringing about positive change?

Design Characteristics

- **Large Multi-Site Sample (48 sites, over 10,000 youth)**

- **Comparison Groups at each site**

- **Common Instrument (CSAP National Youth Survey)**

- **Four Points In Time (program entry, exit, 6-18 months post exit)**

- **Uniform contact data collected for all participants**

- **Systematic collection of data on program characteristics**
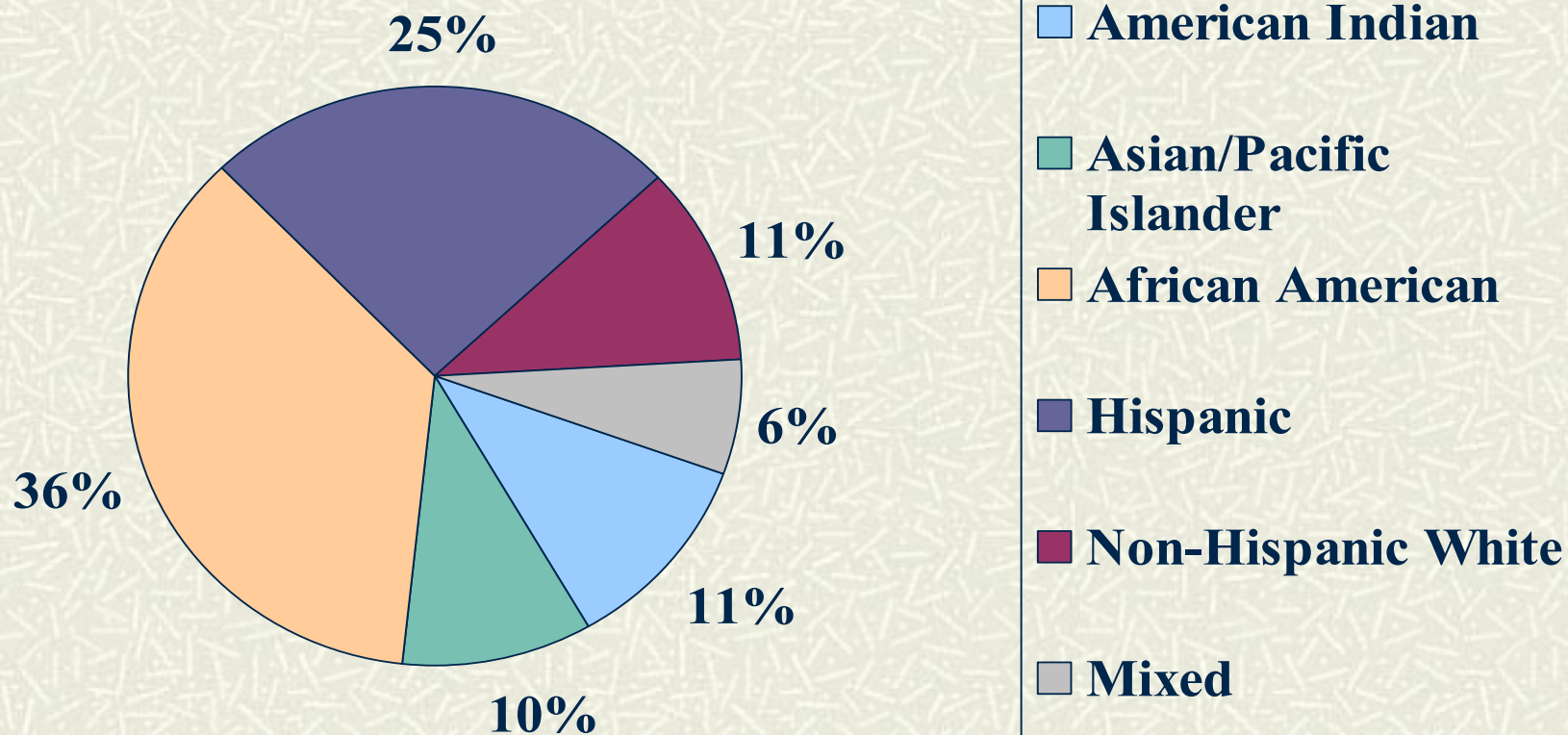
Site Sample
(*N* = 48)
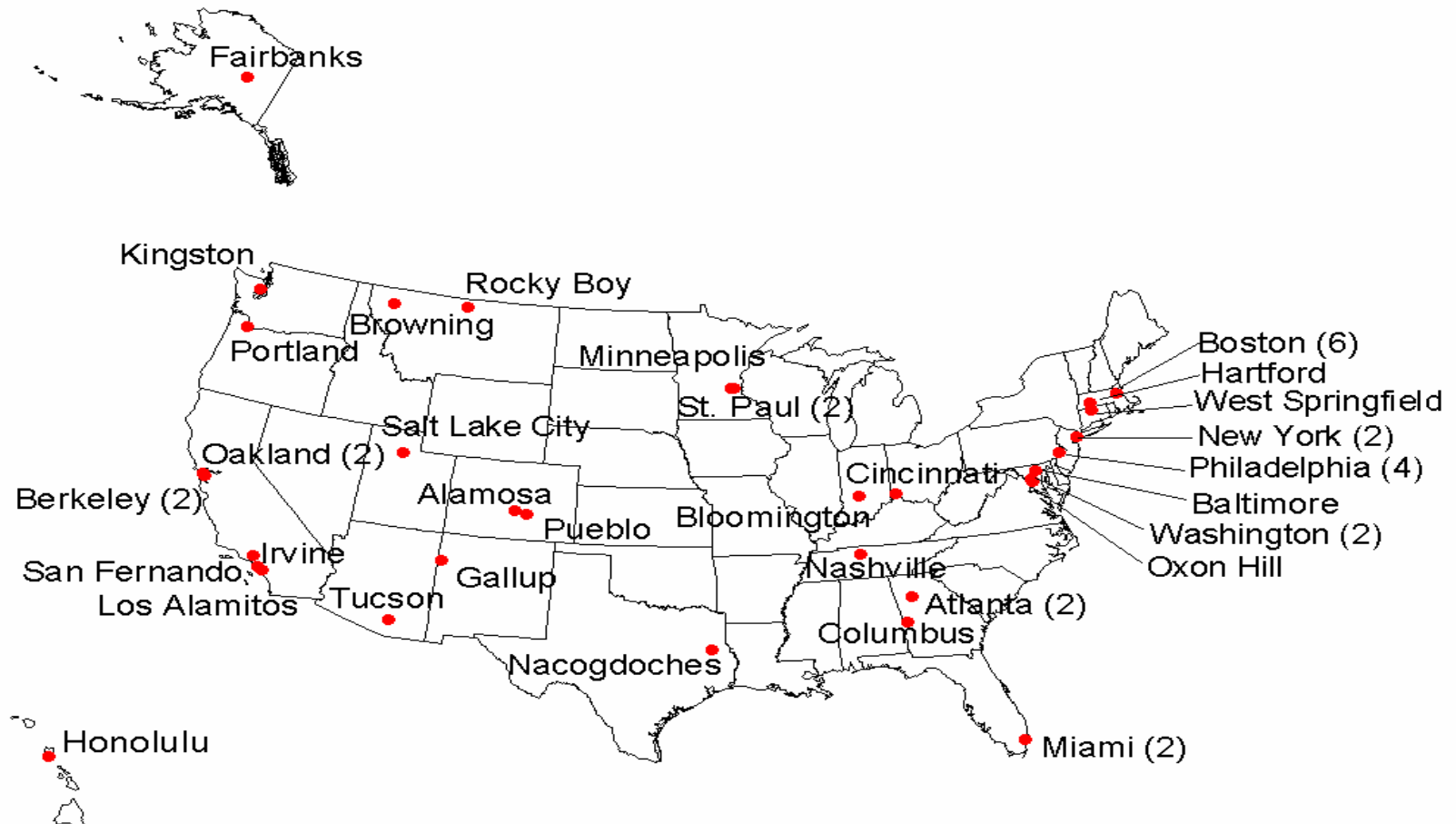
Characteristics of Youth

- Over 6,000 participant and 4,500 comparison youth
- Two-thirds female
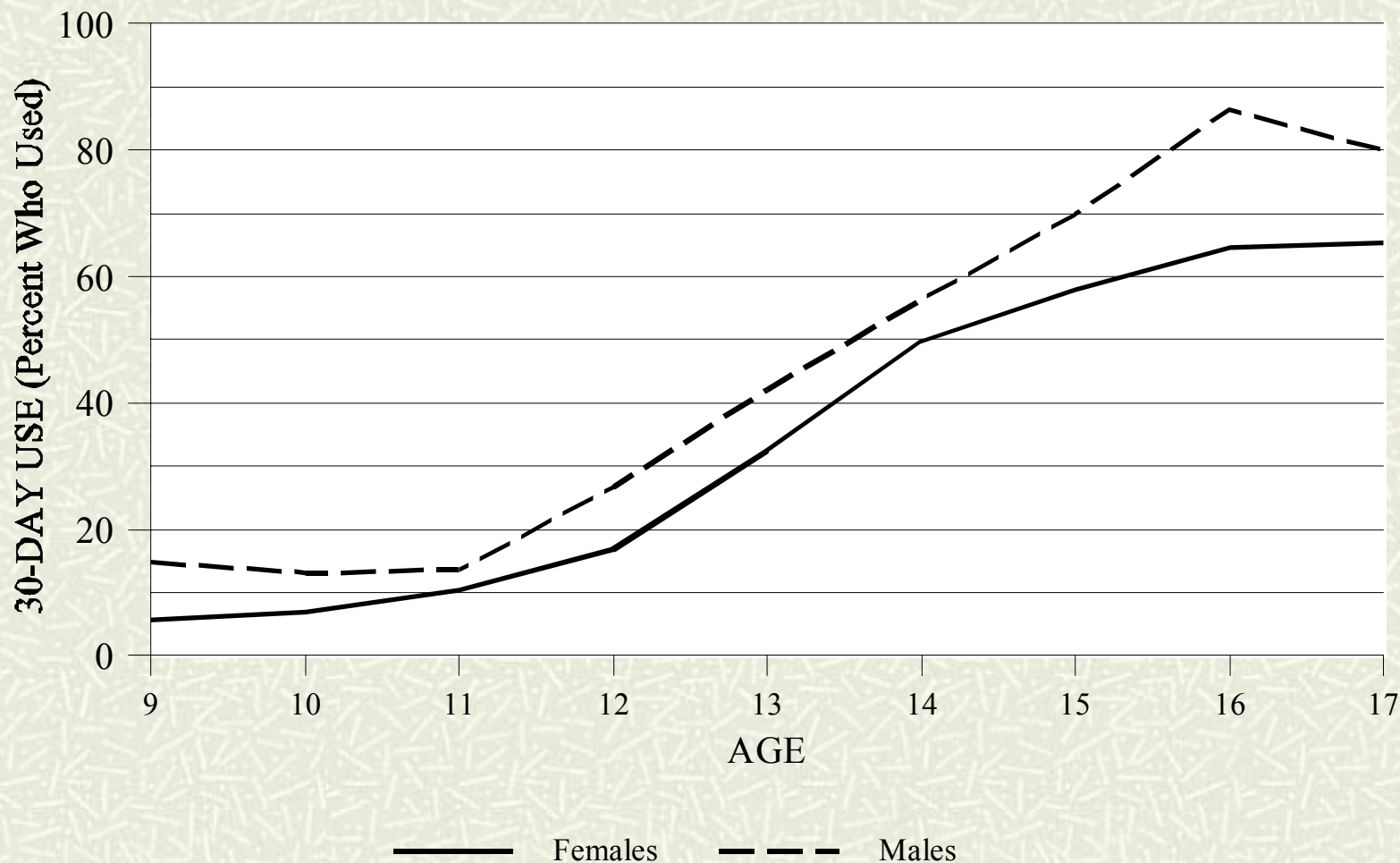- 57% between the ages of 11 and 13

Racial/Ethnic Background of Youth (*N* = 10,473)

Pie chart values: 25%, 11%, 6%, 11%, 10%, 36%

Legend:
- American Indian
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- African American
- Hispanic
- Non-Hispanic White
- Mixed

Percent of Youth Who Use Cigarettes, Alcohol, or Marijuana in Past 30 Days by Age
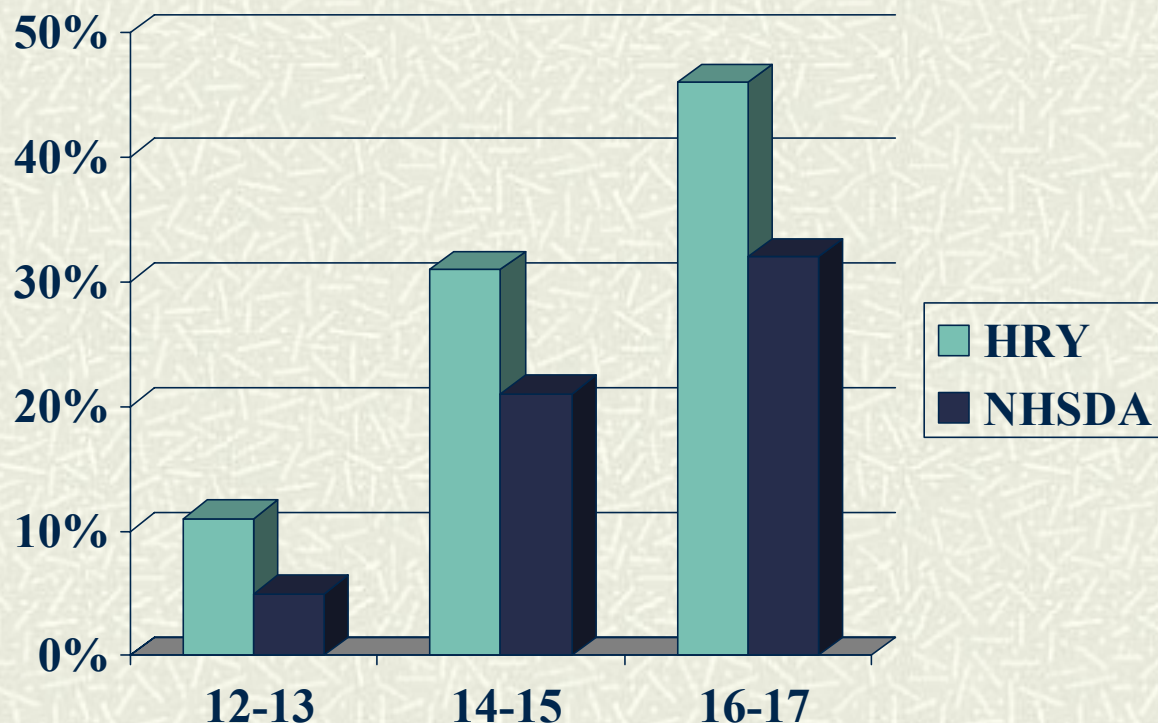
(N = 10,473)

Are Youth in the High-Risk Youth Study Really High Risk?
30-Day Use: HRY and NHSDA Data

Note: NHSDA: National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 1998

Risk and Protective Factor Research Question

- What risk and protective factors contribute most to substance use among high-risk youth?
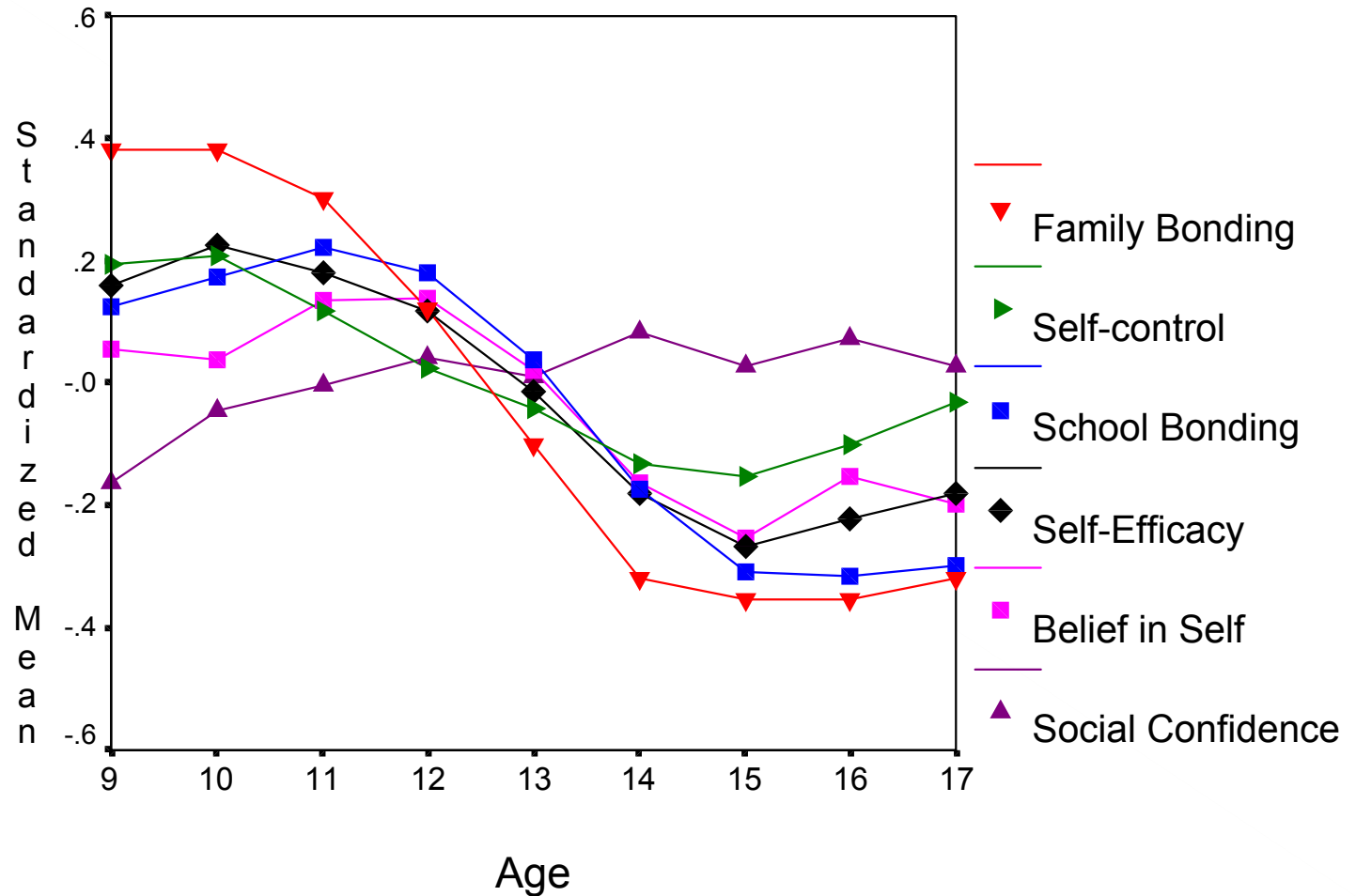
Protective Factors by Age
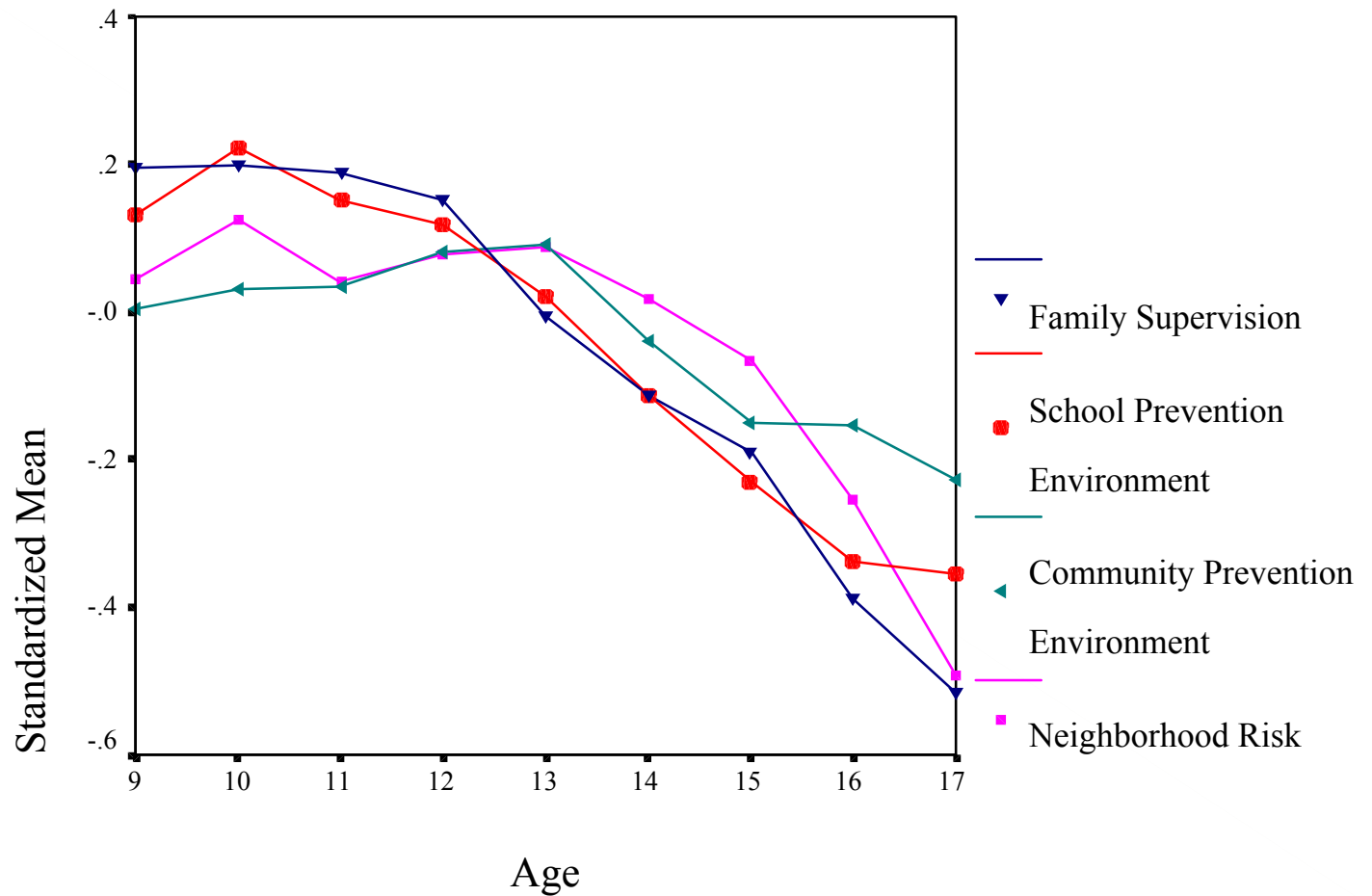## (*N* = 10,473)

More Protection

More Risk

Risk Factors by Age
(*N* = 10,473)

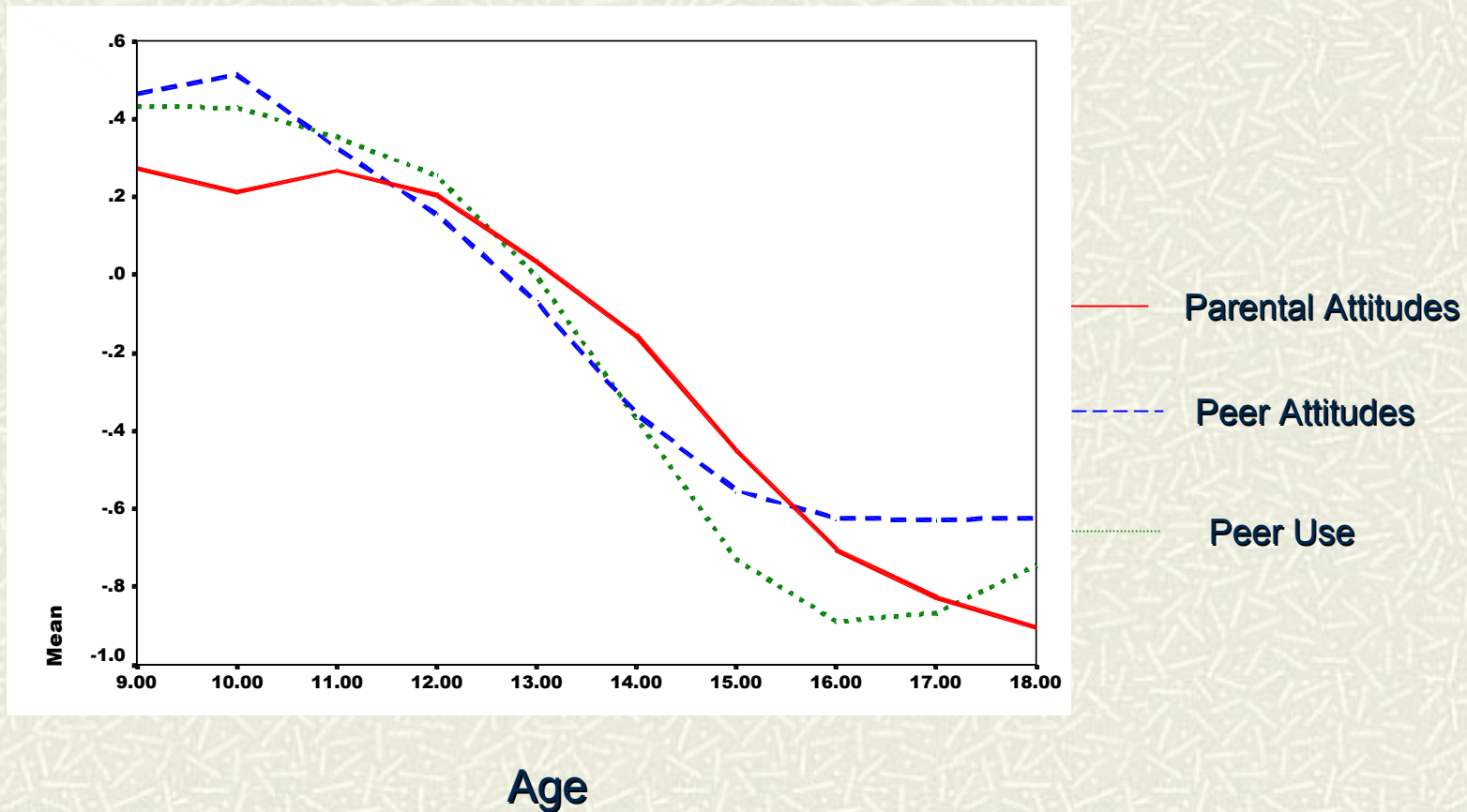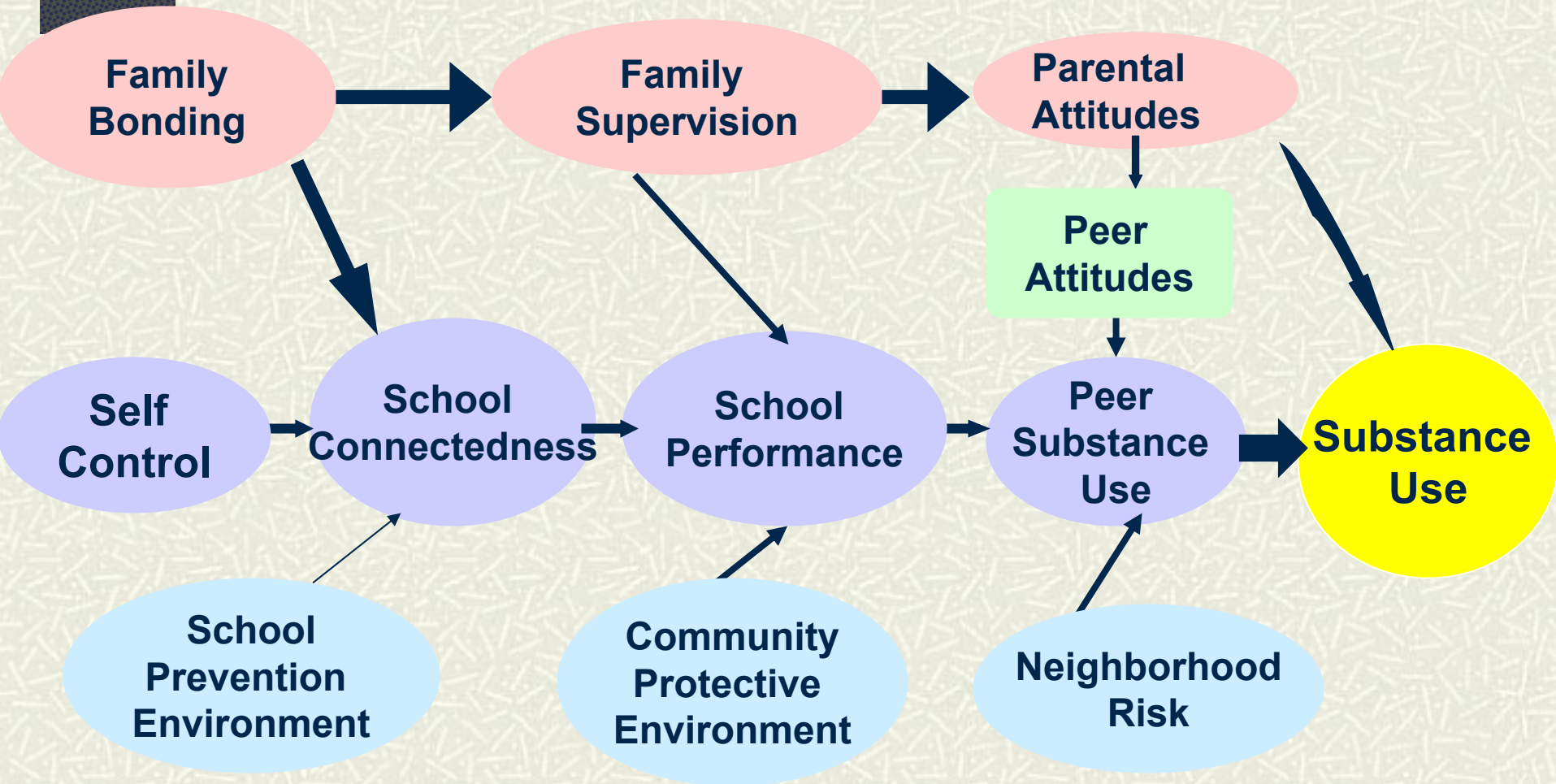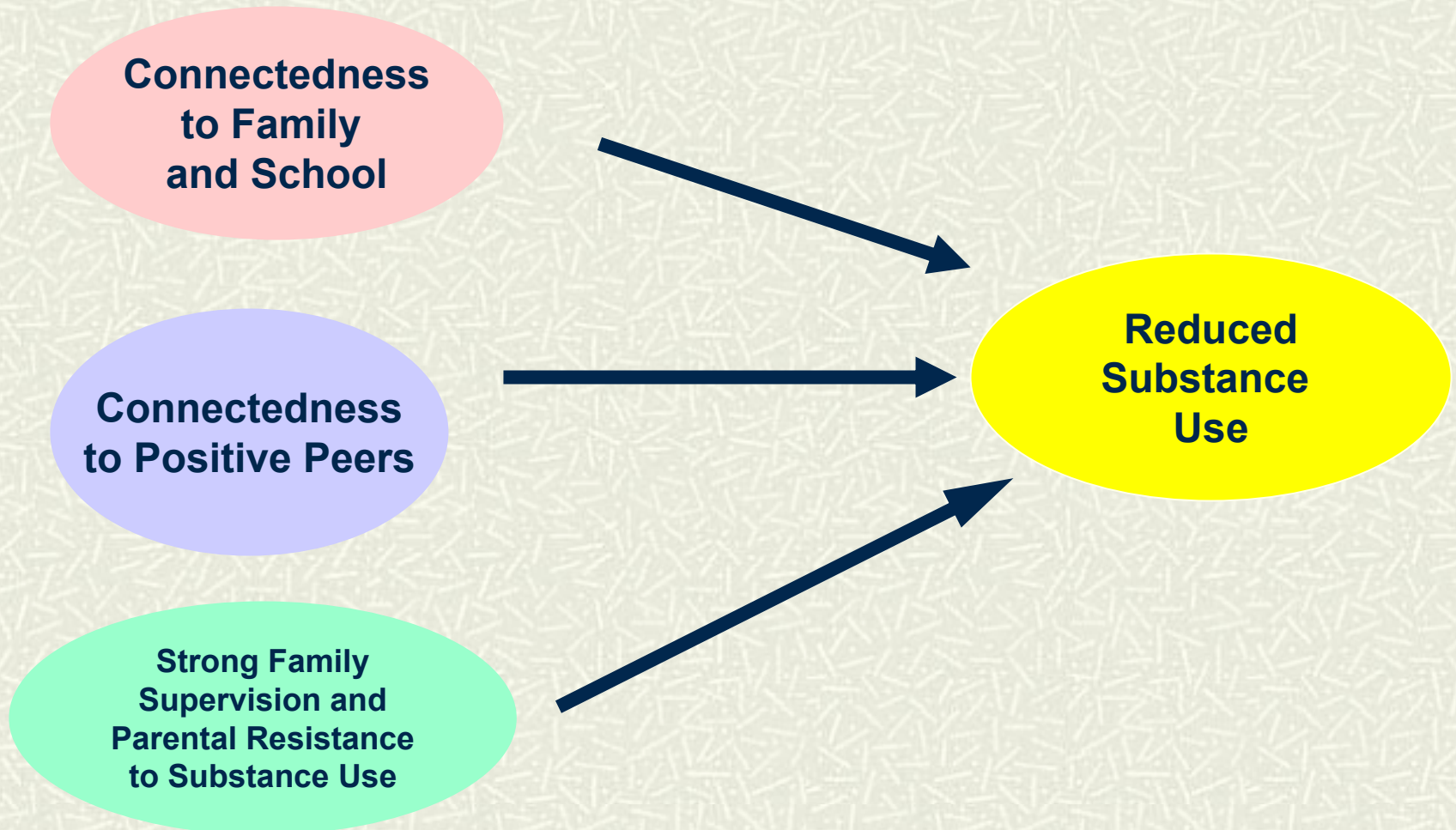# Social Norms by Age

(*N* = 10,473)

Strength of Association among Protective and Risk Factors and Substance Use for Total Sample

Wide arrow= path coefficient >.50 Medium= .20 to .49 Narrow= <.20

Critical Paths to Substance Use Reduction

Summary of Risk and Protective Factor Findings

- Protective factors decline as youth get older; particularly family bonding
- Risk factors increase as youth get older
- Positive social influences decline as youth get older
- Family connectedness, family supervision, parent attitudes all strongly affect adolescent substance use
- School connectedness are also strongly related to substance use

Changes in Substance Use

- Outcome measure: Average numbers of days a youth had used cigarettes, alcohol, and/or marijuana in the past 30 days*

•Responses ranged from 0 to 5. (O) = None; (1) 1 or 2; (2) 3 to 5; (3) 6 to 9;

•(4) 10 to 19; (5) 20 to 31.

Average 30-Day Substance Use Over Time *
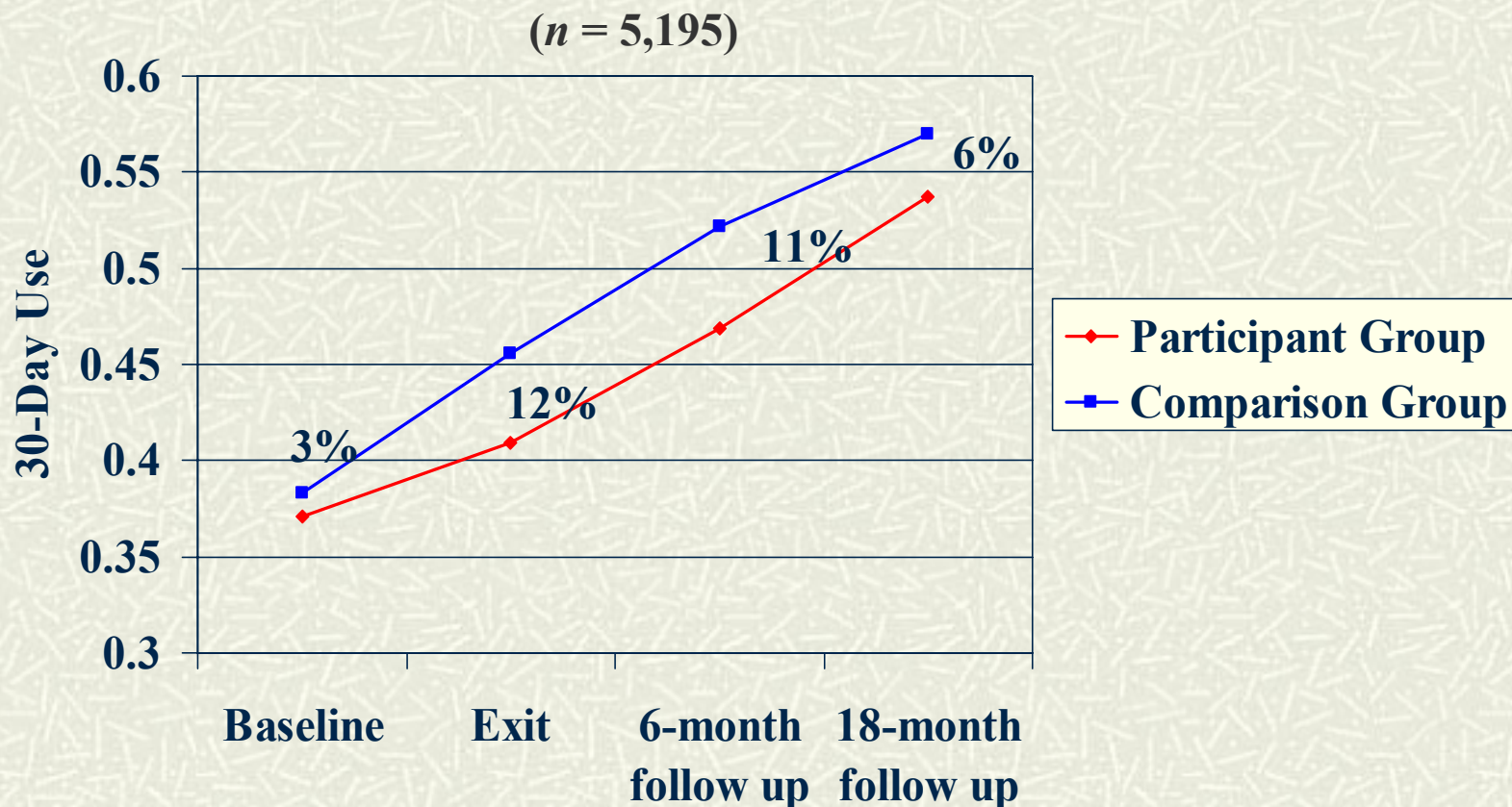
•Calculated for the 23 sites with low comparison group exposure to prevention services. Averages include covariate adjustments. Percentages represent percent difference between participant and comparison group use at each data point.

Average 30-Day Substance Use Over Time for Youth Reporting Use at Program Entry*
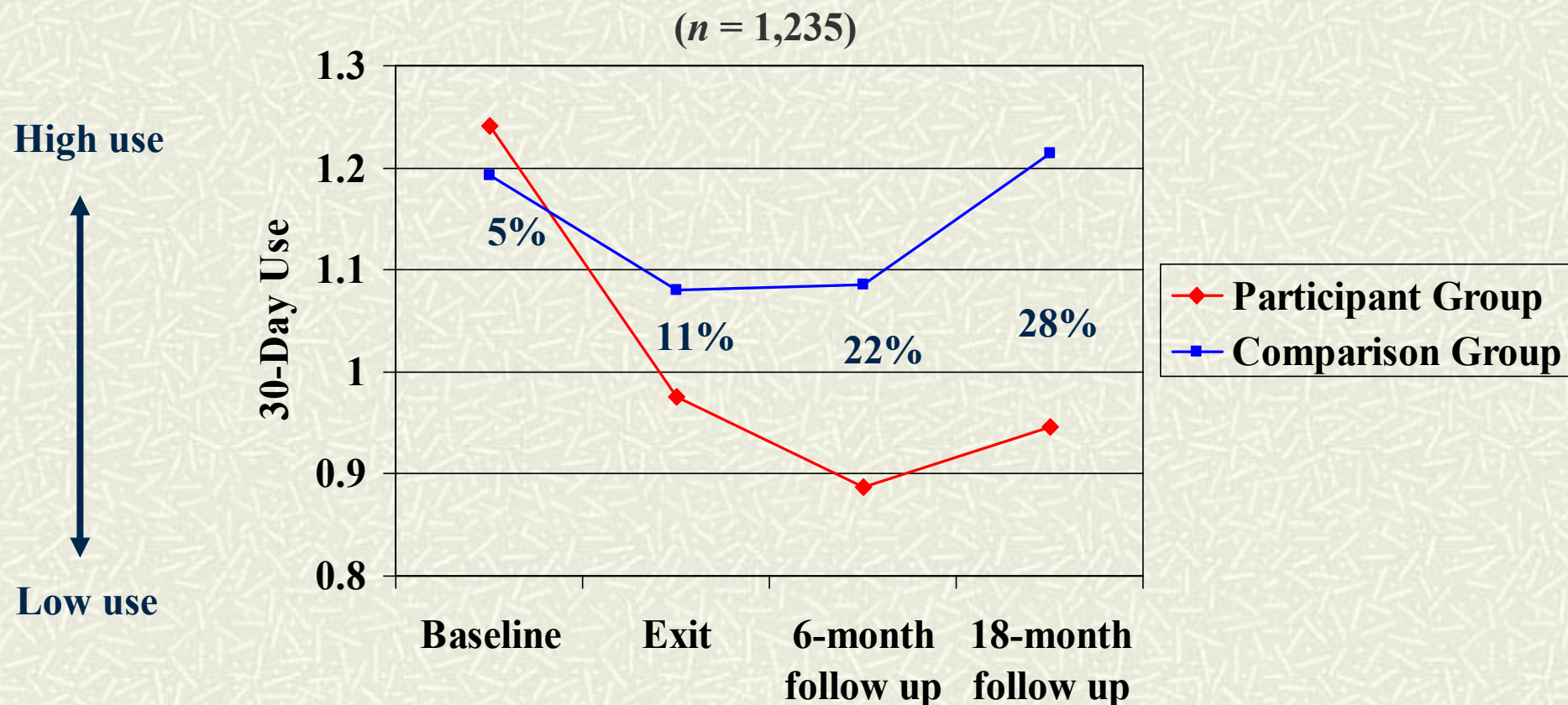

(*n* = 1,235)

High use

Low use

30-Day Use

1.3
1.2
1.1
1
0.9
0.8

5%

11%

22%

28%

Participant Group
Comparison Group

Baseline   Exit   6-month follow up   18-month follow up

* Calculated for the 23 sites with low comparison group exposure to prevention services only.   Averages include covariate adjustments.

Program Characteristics: What Makes Programs Effective?

Program Design

Program Implementation

Effective Programming
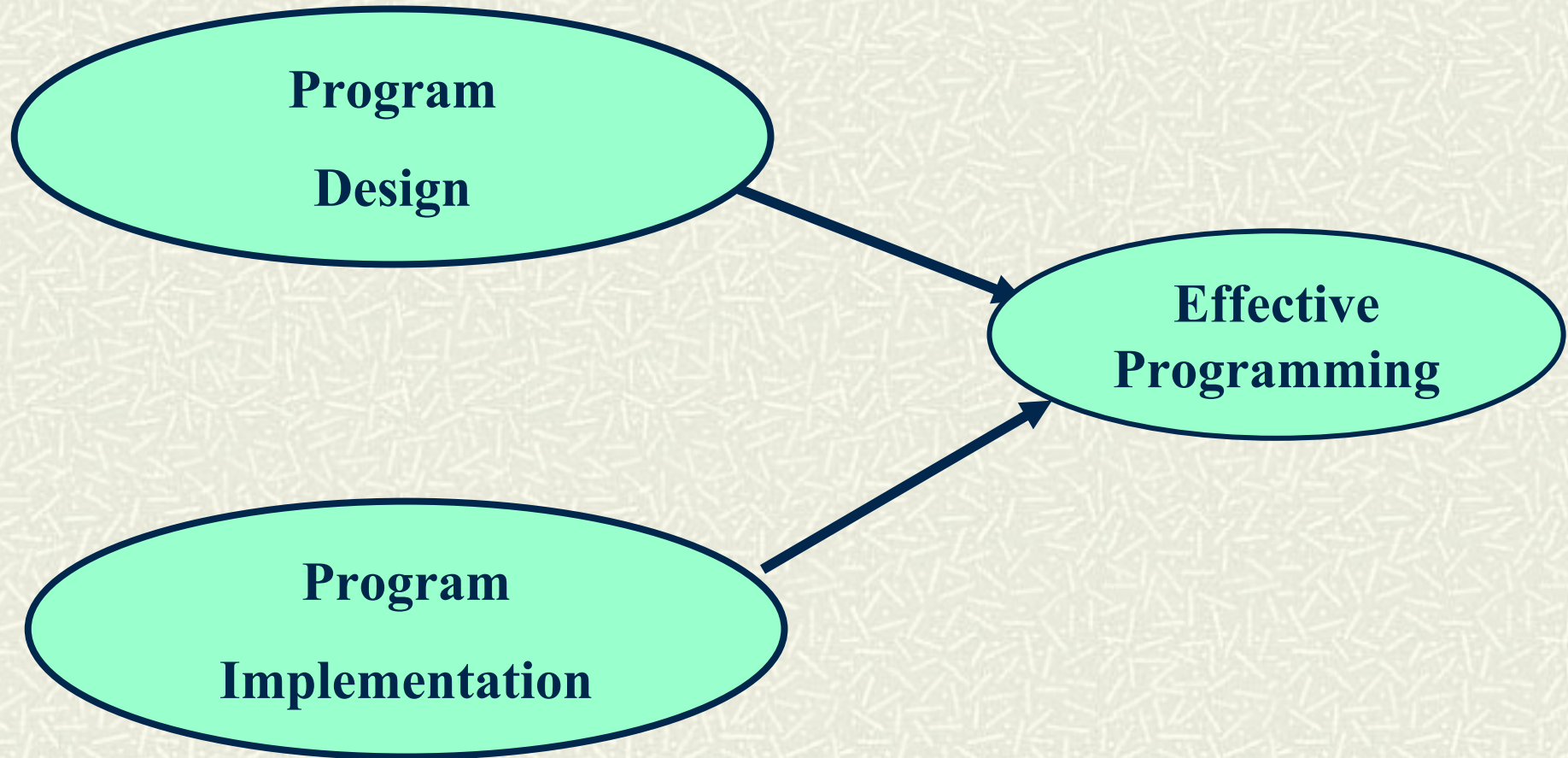
Program Design Measures

- Focus of intervention: 4 main categories
  - Behavioral skills (life skills, communication, anger management, peer refusal skills)
  - Recreation
  - Affective (self-awareness, self-esteem building)
  - Informational
- Method of Delivery
  - Interactive/Non-interactive
- Intensity of Intervention

Program Implementation Measures

- Program coherence
- Program management
- Satisfaction of staff with training
- Strength of local evaluation

Program-Level Findings: Design Characteristics

- **Interactive** programs more effective than non-interactive programs

- **Behavioral skills** programs more effective than informational, recreational, or self-esteem/self-awareness programs

- **Intensive** programs more effective than non-intensive programs

Program-Level Findings: Implementation Characteristics

- **Coherent** programs more effective than more fragmented programs
- Programs with a strong **formative evaluation** component more effective than those with only outcome evaluation
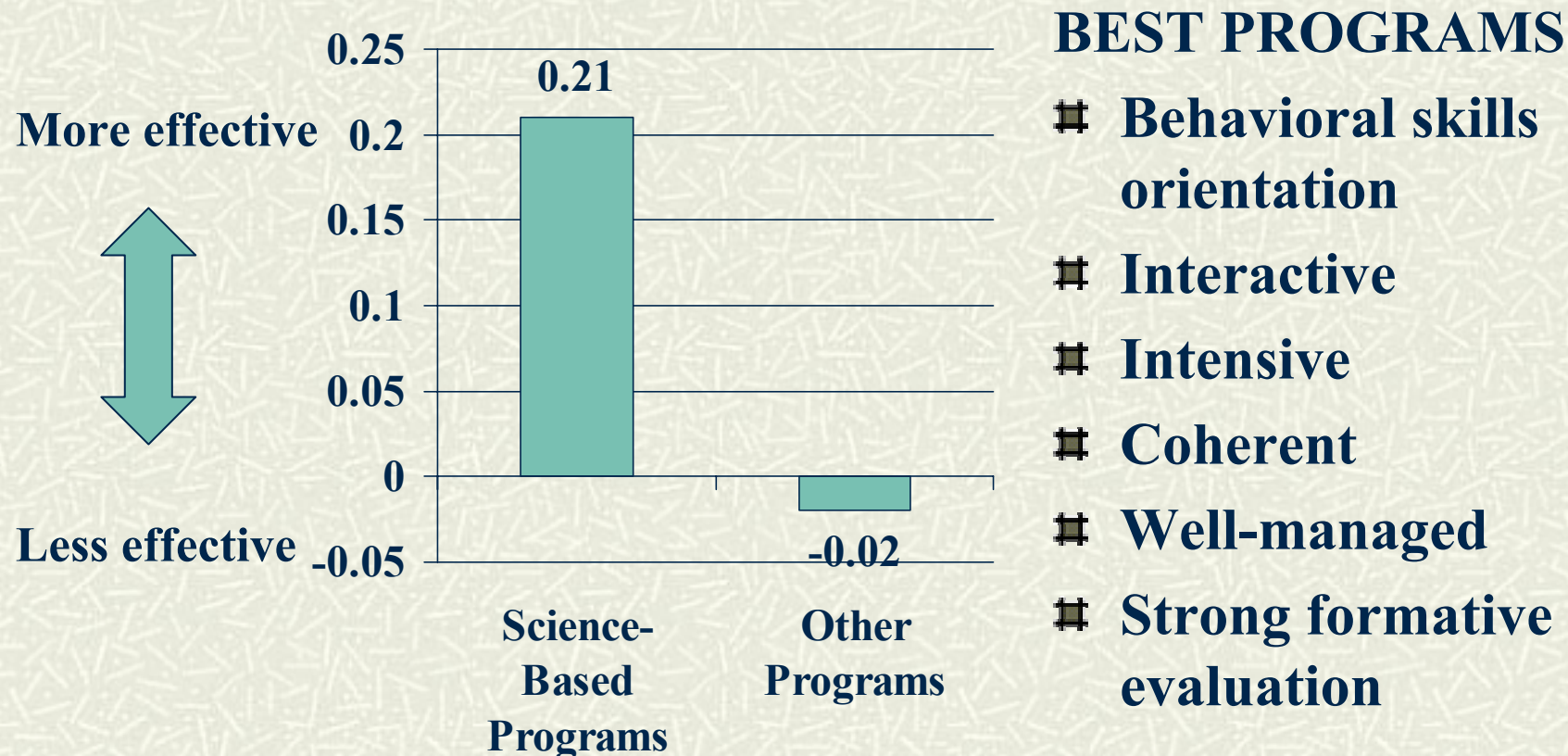- No poorly-managed programs had positive effects

Immediate Effects of Science-based programs

- **The eight prevention programs with the strongest program characteristics were significantly more effective than other programs**

Immediate Effects of Science Based Programs

More effective

Less effective

0.25
0.2
0.15
0.1
0.05
0
-0.05

0.21

-0.02

Science-Based Programs

Other Programs

BEST PROGRAMS

- **Behavioral skills orientation**
- **Interactive**
- **Intensive**
- **Coherent**
- **Well-managed**
- **Strong formative evaluation**

*** Statistically significant at the .001 level.

Longitudinal Effects of Science-based Programs

- The prevention programs with the strongest program characteristics had lasting positive effects on substance use for both boys and girls.
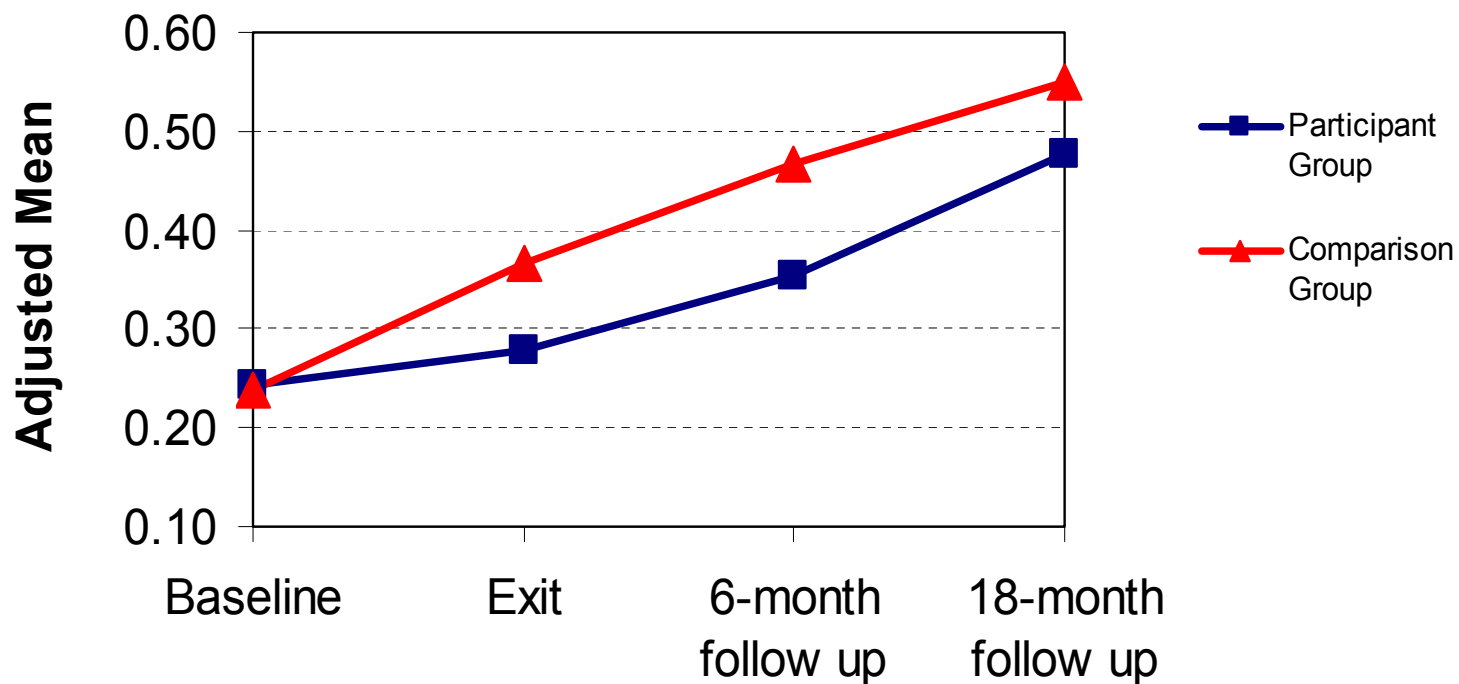
Longitudinal Findings for Science-Based Programs: Girls

High use
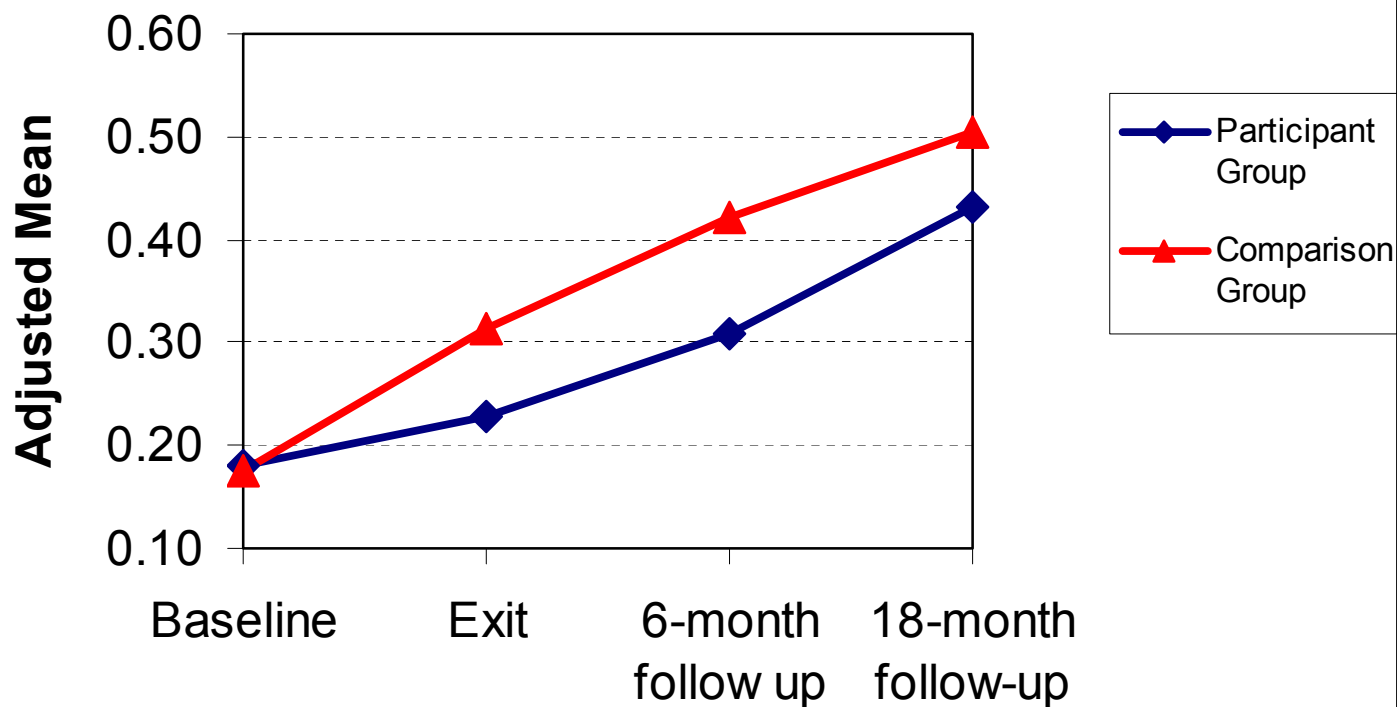
Low use

30-Day Substance Use for Girls
8 Sites Only

Longitudinal Findings for Science-Based Programs: Boys

30-Day Substance Use for Boys
8 Sites Only

High use

Low use

Major Outcome Findings

Prevention Works! Substance use prevention programs reduce rates of substance use, and are particularly effective among youth already using cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana.

Lessons for Prevention Policy and Practice

- Policies for high-risk youth should promote programming that targets family and school.

- Programs should emphasis the **critical** role that parents and teachers play in the development of children's well being, **especially** as children grow older.

Lessons for Prevention Policy and Practice

- **Interactive and behavioral skills** programs should be a focus of future programming.

- **Intensity matters.** The more hours that youth are served per week, the more effective the intervention.

Lessons for Prevention Policy and Practice

- **Formative evaluation** leads to successful programming. Continual feedback from a skilled evaluator can help improve program outcomes.

- **Coherent** programming is critical. All staff need to understand the program theory and implement it on a daily basis.

More national study findings to come…

- Starting Early Starting Smart (families with children 0-6)
- Project Youth Connect Mentoring Programs
- Parenting Adolescents Programs
- Family Strengthening Programs
- HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs